

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ATHENS 00161 081756Z

72

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SUBJECT: GREEK/BULGARIAN RELATIONS - FONMIN BITSIOS' VISIT

VIEWED AS IMPROVING BILATERAL COOPERATION

REF: ATHENS 9072 (1974)

1. SUMMARY: FM DIMITRI BITSIOS IN FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO BOLSTER BILATERAL RELATIONS LEFT ATHENS JAN 8 FOR THREE DAY TRIP TO BULGARIA. ATHENS PRESS ANTICIPATES BITSIOS AND BULGARIAN FM MLADENOV WILL DISCUSS CYPRUS, MIDDLE EAST, AND BILATERAL RELATIONS. EDITORIALS REFER TO GREECE'S GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY OF COLLABORATION WITH BALKAN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES AND PREDICT BROADER COOPERATION FROM SOPHIA TALKS IN TOURISM, TRADE, AND CULTURE. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM ATHENS AT NOON JAN 8 GREEK PRESS REPORTED FULLY AND RAN SEVERAL EDITORIALS ON IMPORTANCE OF FM BITSIOS' VISIT TO BULGARIA. BITSIOS WAS ACCOMPANIED BY TOP PERSONNEL FROM MFA, DIRECTOR GENERAL
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PAGE 02 ATHENS 00161 081756Z

FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS JOHN TSOUNIS, PERM REP TO UN OFFICES

IN GENEVA, D. VELISSAROPOULOS, AND AMBASSADOR C. KATSAMBIS, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS. BITSIOS VISIT RECIPROCATES 1973 VISIT TO ATHENS OF BULGARIAN FM PETER TOSHEV MLADENOV AND ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS AIMS AT STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION ON BASIS OF BILATERAL AGREEMENTS SIGNED IN 1964 DEALING WITH TRADE, TOURISM, AIR LINK BETWEEN ATHENS AND SOPHIA AND JOINT DEVELOPMENT OF THREE RIVERS TRAVERSING BOTH COUNTRIES.

3. NEWSPAPERS AND RADIO/TV JANUARY 7 AND 8 GAVE HEAVY PLAY TO BITSIOS' VISIT REFERRING TO BULGARIA'S SYMPATHETIC ATTITUDE DURING UN DISCUSSIONS ON CYPRUS AND TO BULGARIA'S WARM GREETINGS MARKING RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY TO GREECE. ALL NEWSPAPERS REPORT GREEK FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT WILL OPEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR BROADER COOPERATION IN ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND TOURISM AREAS.

4. AKROPOLIS IN EDITORIAL COMMENT NOTED THAT VISIT TAKES PLACE WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY OF GREECE. "GREEK FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION TOWARD BALKAN COUNTRIES TAKES ON SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE AT TIME WHEN EUROPEAN AND WESTERN ECONOMIES ARE GOING THROUGH CRITICAL PERIOD." RIZOSPASTIS AND AVGHI (COMMUNIST PRESS) ACCLAIMED VISIT AS GREECE'S NEW APPROACH TO BALKANS AND STRESSED THAT BULGARIA HAS ALWAYS SHOWN ITS LOVE FOR PEACE AS MANIFESTED IN ITS ADVOCATING AN INDEPENDENT AND SOVEREIGN CYPRUS AND THEREFORE "...BULGARIA'S PRESENCE SAFEGUARDS GREECE'S INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY." COMMUNIST PAPERS STRESSED BULGARIA'S STEADY ECONOMIC PROGRESS AS SIGNALLING OPPORTUNITY FOR GREECE TO ASSOCIATE AND EXPAND RELATIONS WITH PROSPERITY AND STABILITY OF NEIGHBOR. MORE DETAILED EDITORIAL IN ELEFTEROS COSMOS BY ALEXANDRA STEAPHANOPOULOU NOTED THAT IN 1964 GREECE AND BULGARIA SETTLED OUTSTANDING DIFFERENCES INHERITED FROM WWII AND DECALRED "TERRITIRIAL CLAIMS ON EACH OTHER WERE FOREVER EXCLUDED." LATER IN 1970 FM BASHEV OF BULGARIA VISITED ATHENS AND IN 1971 GREEK FM PALAMAS RETURNED VISIT TO SOPHIA. SERIES OF VISITS ARE VIEWED AS ESTABLISHING GROUNDWORK LEADING TO BROADER BILATERAL RELATIONS. STEPHANOPOULOU CONCLUDED THAT BETTER RELATIONS WITH BULGARIA MARKED AXIS OF PEACE IN BALKANS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 ATHENS 00161 081756Z

AND MOREOVER WITH CYPRUS UNSETTLED AND GREECE OUTSIDE OF NATO'S MILITARY ARM, FRIENDSHIP WITH BULGARIA ACQUIRES SPECIAL IMPORTANCE. ONLY ATHENS POST CONJECTURED THAT GREECE SINCE WITHDRAWAL FROM NATO IS PLANNING BILATERAL AGREEMENTS WITH WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO SAFEGUARD ITS DEFENSE AND GOG REPORTEDLY DESIRES SIMILAR AGREEMENTS WITH BALKAN NEIGHBORS.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH PM CARAMANLIS IS FIRST
MAJOR ADDRESS SPOKE OF IMPERATIVE OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH
ALL COUNTRIES INCLUDING BALKANS, GREEK/BALKAN OFFICIAL
RELATIONS HAVE SEESAWED IRREGULARLY DURING LAST 30 YEARS
AND MANY GREEKS RETAIN STRONG SUSPICIONS AND PREAPPREHENSIONS
ABOUT THEIR NORTHERN NEIGHBORS, NOT THE LEAST BULGARIA,
WHERE ALONG COMMON BORDER STRENGTH OF GREECE'S ARMY IS
POISED. OUTCOME OF BITSIOS' VISIT WILL PROBABLY BE MORE
IN TERMS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL BACK-PATTING THAN IN SPECIFICS
OF NEW ACCORDS.
STEARNS

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